

The shifting cityscape of Amsterdam

Thesis Abstract

Gentrification is, roughly put, the transformation of working-class neighborhoods to higher socio-economic residency. The human geography literature has so far seen very few attempts to spatially map the process of gentrification inside a city. In this thesis, I develop and test a methodology to fill the gap in the literature. I build a test case for Amsterdam using an extremely rich dataset of housing transaction prices, which enables me to look at the change in spatial patterns over time at a very detailed level. Using these data, I create a number of animated GIS (AGIS), which show a number of nuanced patterns in the spatial spreading of gentrification throughout the city over the period 1985-2010.

The data show an axis of expensive housing cutting through the city from the Canal District to the Vondelpark, from which gentrification radiates outward, claiming neighborhood by neighborhood in a wave-like pattern over the decades as the (higher) middle classes returned to the city center. There are some factors stopping or slowing its spread. The strongest of these are large, connected blocks of socially rented housing. However, small bodies of water and official (yet non-physical) neighborhood boundaries also appear to be surprisingly effective at slowing the process.

The full thesis is available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/me2tczb>

The monsters in the IJ

The IJ water is not very wide and crossed 24/7 by ferries, free of charge, but has a huge mental impact: most people feel Noord is far removed from the center. This is visible in hard economic indicators: as the housing prices move up and down over the years, the prices in Noord move in tandem with the prices outside the ring road.

Siberia

Colloquially known as the 'Siberia of Amsterdam', Noord has been the stepchild of both municipal policy and aspiring house buyers for decades. That has certainly changed on one side. Recently, the municipality has pumped billions into Noord in the form of eye-catching waterfront development and a completely new metro tunnel connecting Noord to the rest of the city. Whether this will result in turning around the reputation of the area remains to be seen; the housing prices are still as low as outside the ring road.

The Role of the Ring

The Ring road is the final frontier for gentrification in Amsterdam. Many locals do not consider the area beyond the ring road to be a part of the city proper, and there is a local saying that 'beyond the Ring, the vegetation starts'. However, it has not always been like that. The role of the ring has changed over the past years, from having little meaning in the urban fabric in 1995 to clearly cutting out the inner city as a desirable living location vis-à-vis the outlying areas in 2010.

Im Osten nichts neues

The east is the last part of the city to gentrify. This is partly because this part of the city contains the largest amount of social housing, which is not traded in the regular housing market, and partly it seems to be simply because all the gentrification action started from the Canal District-Vondelpark axis.

General gentrification axis

There are two centers from which the gentrification originates: the Canal District and the Vondelpark. Over the entire 25-year period, prices rise in those two areas, and like ripples in a pond the phenomenon spreads out. Thus, we can observe an axis of gentrification running from the Central Station to the south end of the Vondelpark. Even in a city with a

Why Watergraafsmeer?

This area presents an exception to the city-wide pattern. Where rising prices generally spread out like a wave from the axis between the Canal District and Vondelpark, this area gentrified completely on its own, while surrounding neighborhoods remained poor.

Borders of water

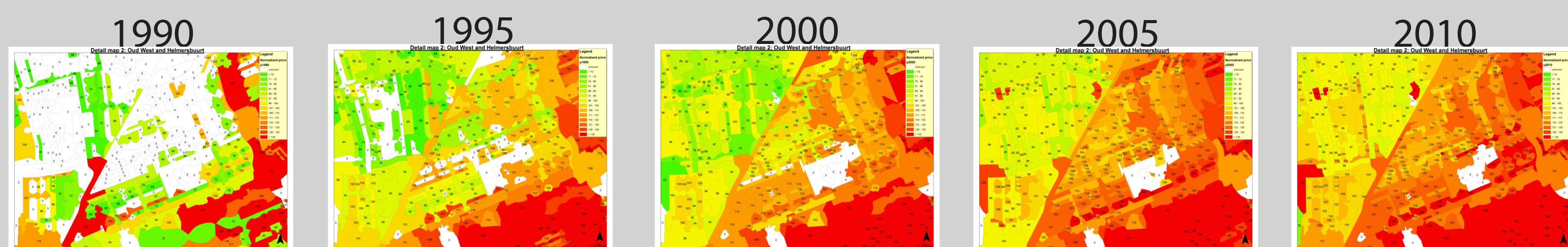
Water appears to be a strong natural barrier to gentrification processes. In the West the pattern is broken by the Kostverlorenvaart. Apparently, although this body of water is only 20 meters wide and bridged at regular intervals of less than 1 km each time, it presents some kind of barrier for the gentrifying population. In the east the pattern stops at the Amstel, after which the Eastern District starts.

Background

Amsterdam is changing rapidly. Although the city has always exerted a strong pull on the young and adventurous, after the Second World War there was a period when the city population strongly declined, housing prices sank; the municipality seemed at a loss to stem the tide. However, this population decline created room for change and new initiative in the city, and as city living became fashionable once more, Amsterdam was flooded with new inhabitants. This was accompanied by a steep rise in housing prices. Thus, like many other cities around the world, Amsterdam has experienced a wave of gentrification over the past decades. This poster shows how that wave spread throughout the city and explains some of the factors behind it.

Animated GIS on a poster

The core of this thesis is an animated GIS, which cannot be shown on a poster. To give an idea of the uses of such an AGIS, here is as an example a series of stills showing the Oud West area, just north of the very wealthy Vondelpark neighbourhood. The stills show how, over two decades, rising housing prices moved through the area like a tide coming out of the south and the east, stopping against the Kostverlorenvaart water. Full video: <http://tinyurl.com/kpjqrda>.



Legend

- Housing price as % of the citywide average
- 50-60%
- 60-70%
- 70-80%
- 80-90%
- 90-100%
- 100-110%
- 110-120%
- 120-130%
- 130-140%
- 140-150%
- >150%
- Roads
- Water
- Buildings
- Gentrification spreading direction



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